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LONG TERM PARTICIPATION IN
THE FOOD STAMP PROGRAM
BY WORK REGISTRANTS

FINAL REPORT
VOLUME I

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A. INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings of an exploratory study concerning participation in the Food Stamp Program by work registrants. Since the early 1970s, certain members of households that apply for food stamps have had to register with the Employment Service (ES) and meet other requirements such as job search or workfare in order to establish and maintain their eligibility for assistance.* These persons are generally able-bodied, non-elderly adults who do not have primary responsibility for the care of children or disabled persons living in their household. It is reasonable, therefore, that they should seek employment to provide income that would assist the household in meeting its nutritional needs.

Although more information has recently become available about households' participation in the Food Stamp Program over time, a number of important questions remain, particularly with regard to work registrants. First, it is not clear how extensive long term participation is among work registrants. Whereas Burstein and Visser (1989) report a median spell of 5-6 months, work registrant households in the control group of the Food Stamp Workfare Demonstration Project had spells with a median duration of 4 months (Urban Institute, 1987: 8). An FNS analysis (1986: 31) of data from the Integrated Quality Control System indicated an average length of stay of 8.1 months for work registrants. Our review of these studies indicates that, more than anything else, the variation in these estimates is due to the design of the data bases from which they were derived.

Second, long-term dependency in the Food Stamp Program, particularly for work registrants, may follow patterns that are different from those exhibited by AFDC recipients or participants in other programs that have categorical eligibility criteria. One pattern is continuous participation over a relatively long period. Another pattern would be a series of relatively short spells separated by periods of nonparticipation. Both reflect long term dependency, but of two distinct types. Both types of long term participants also are

*An historical overview of the evolution of work requirements in the Food Stamp Program may be found in a recent report by Abt Associates (1988).

likely to consume a great deal of resources (both in benefits and in administrative costs), and therefore, need to be identified and studied.

A third question is whether employment and training services can be targeted more efficiently and effectively toward long term work registrants. If a significant proportion of work registrants tends to become dependent on the Food Stamp Program, it may be possible to develop strategies to reduce the costs associated with long term participation. However, we must first demonstrate on at least a preliminary basis that some work registrants do, in fact, become dependent on food stamps and generate substantial program costs.

Consistent with the questions outlined above, this study was undertaken to address the following specific objectives:

- . to describe patterns of participation in the Food Stamp Program by an entry cohort of work registrants who were subject to a meaningful work requirement;
- . to assess the extent of long term participation by work registrants, in terms of both long single spells and a series of spells; and
- . to measure the allotment costs for work registrants, according to the patterns of participation they exhibit.

B. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research design developed for this study involved taking samples of work registrants who initially entered the Food Stamp Program in Alabama and the State of Washington during the first half of 1986. Data were collected in two localities in each State. The history of participation for these sample households in was followed through the fall of 1988 by manually abstracting food stamp and Employment Service (ES) case record data.

An advantage of this design is that it permits a followup of a defined group of work registrants (i.e., a sample that is representative of registrants entering the program during a specific time period and in specific localities) from the beginning of their participation through a defined period. It also avoids the upwardly biased estimates of spell length that occur in longitudinal analyses of cross-sectional samples of participants because they tend to over-represent long-term cases. The use of an entry cohort, in contrast, provides findings that are representative of the broader group of cases that enters the program during a given period. As a result, it affords unique insight into the potential problem of multiple spells as a special pattern of long-term dependency.

The primary purpose of the analysis of the case record and survey data is to determine the duration of spells and patterns of participation of an entry cohort of work registrants over as many as 33 months. Because some spells are in progress at the end of data collection (i.e., they are right-censored), life table techniques are needed to avoid truncation bias. Life table analyses have been performed for each of the first, second and higher order spells of food stamp participation.

C. CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Given the scope of this study, we should consider two major issues related to the internal and external validity of this study. First, in light of our objective to examine work registrants' participation in the face of a meaningful work requirement, we need to assess whether this actually was the case in the study sites. Of special concern is how quickly the work registration/job search (WR/JS) process got underway for each work registrant, whether the work registrant complied with work requirements, and how carefully the Employment Service (ES) and the food stamp office monitored compliance. Collectively, these characteristics of the WR/JS process define the work requirement that was imposed on the study subjects.

**Implementation
of Food Stamp
Work Require-
ments**

Exhibit 1 provides a summary of findings regarding the WR/JS process in the study sites. The highlights are:

- most ES assessment interviews were not scheduled until the month after the month in which the food stamp application was submitted, and many were not scheduled until two months later;
- most work registrants in the study sites failed to keep the first appointment for their assessment interview;
- the ES eventually submitted reports of noncompliance for approximately half of all the work registrants whose cases were included in the study; and
- fewer than one of five sample work registrants in Alabama and only two of five in Washington actually contacted potential employers in a job search.

Exhibit 1

**Work Registration/Job Search
Activities Among Sample Work Registrants**

Work Registration/ Job Search Activity	Alabama	Washington
Assessment Scheduled:		
Same Month as FSP Application	10.6%	26.1%
One Month After FSP Application	51.5%	57.7%
> 1 Month After FSP Application	37.9%	16.2%
Failed to Keep Appointment	65.1%	54.4%
Noncompliance Report Filed by ES	51.9%	49.4%
Engaged in Job Search	18.6%	41.8%

These findings can be explained in part by the fact that work registrants tend to remain on food stamps for relatively brief spells. As we discuss below, approximately half of the work registrants included in this study spent three months or less on food stamps before ending their first spell. It appears that by the time an appointment was scheduled (or rescheduled) or before job search began, many work registrant households had left the Food Stamp Program. It is plausible, therefore, that the high rate of turnover among work registrants simply made it difficult for the food stamp and ES offices to keep pace with the flow of work registrants through the program.

**Characteristics
of Work Regis-
trants**

The second issue related to the generalizability of this study's findings concerns the representativeness of the sample work registrants. The typical work registrant in this study was relatively young (a mean of 33.8 years in Alabama and 30.2 years in Washington), and a large proportion had not completed 12 years of education (42.5 percent in Alabama and 35.2 percent in Washington). Slightly more than half (55 percent) of the sample work registrants in Alabama were female, whereas women comprised approximately one-third (35 percent) of the sample in Washington. Although case records in Washington did not indicate the race of work registrants, data from Alabama showed that nearly three of five (59 percent) work registrants in that State were black. Only one-third (34 percent) of the sample work registrants in Alabama had work experience, whereas nearly four of five (79.6 percent) work registrants in Washington had worked. Of those who had work experience, nearly half in both States (47.5 percent in Alabama and 45.7 percent in Washington) had worked less than six months in their most recent job.

Many of the work registrants in the study samples lack the education and training that is necessary for them to obtain jobs that pay well and are not subject to being eliminated during recessionary periods. Also, despite their general lack of education and training, the majority of work registrants in the two study samples were more likely to have recent work experience than previous research would suggest. Perhaps more than any other personal factor, this experience should facilitate their return to the labor force, and their departure from the Food Stamp Program. However, we should recognize that experience and training cannot always counteract the powerful market forces that prevail in periods of economic decline.

**Characteristics
of Work Regis-
trant Households**

Many work registrants (46.9 percent in Alabama and 55.5 percent in Washington) lived in one-person food stamp households. One-third of the work registrant households in Alabama and fewer than one-fourth (21.5 percent) of those in Washington contained three or more members. One-third (32.9 percent) of the households in Washington and one-fourth (25.8 percent) of the households in Alabama had earnings when they applied for food stamps in early 1986. The sample households in Washington received an average food stamp allotment of \$105, whereas those in Alabama received coupons worth \$132.

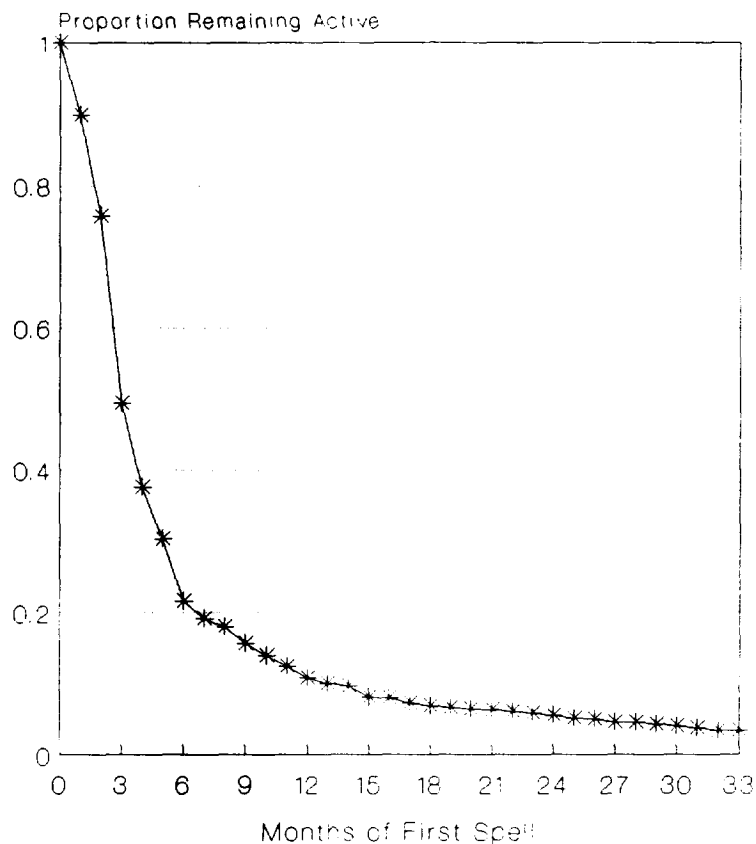
D. LONGITUDINAL ANALYSIS OF PARTICIPATION

**Duration of
Initial Spells**

Exhibit 2 presents the results of a life-table analysis of the initial spells of all the sample work registrant cases from Alabama and Washington. The numbers along the horizontal axis indicate the number of months following initial food stamp certification. The numbers along the vertical axis range from 0 to 1.0, where 1.0 indicates the full sample as of the month of initial certification for each case in the sample. Thus, one month after initial certification, approximately 90 percent of the cases remained active. Stated another way, 10 percent of the cases received food stamps for one month, but did not receive food stamps in what would have been the second month of their certification period. Similarly, by the end of two months, about 25 percent of the work registrant households were no longer participating. In general, approximately half of the entry cohort had left the Food Stamp Program by the end of the third month. Thus, the median spell length for initial spells across both States is 2.97 months. Only 3.4 percent of the work registrant households that initially entered the Food Stamp Program in early 1986 would still be active 33 months later.

The pattern of first spells we have just described is important. Nearly three-fourths (72.6 percent) of the Alabama work registrant households and two-thirds (66.4 percent) of the Washington households experienced only one spell of participation. In terms of the number of households affected by work requirements, therefore, the experience of most is reflected in Exhibit 2.

Exhibit 2
Proportion of Cases Remaining Active
After Successive Months of First Spell



Multiple Spells

Based on life-table estimates, 32 percent of work registrant households that leave the Food Stamp Program after an initial spell in Washington and Alabama would later apply for and receive food stamps in the same locality within 33 months of initial certification of first spell. The distribution of cases by number of spells is shown in Exhibit 3. It indicates a very similar pattern of multiple spells, in that nearly one-fourth of the entry cohort (20.7 percent in Alabama and 24.7 percent in Washington) experienced two spells, and about one in 20 cases (4.6 percent in Alabama and six percent in Washington) experienced three spells. Fewer than three percent of the households in either State had more than three spells.

Exhibit 3
Distribution of Cases by Number of Spells
and Length of Spells

Number of Spells	Alabama		Washington	
	%	Median Spell (mos.)	%	Median Spell (mos.)
1: 1-3 mos.	41.6	2	29.2	3
1: 4-6 mos.	15.5	5	23.8	5
1: > 6 mos.	<u>15.5</u>	15	<u>13.2</u>	13
1: Subtotal	72.6	3	66.2	4
2	20.7	5	24.9	4
3	4.6	*	6.0	*
4	1.7	*	1.8	*
5	0.4	*	0.7	*
6	--	*	0.4	*
Total	100.0%		100.0%	
N	459		281	

*Not computed due to small subsamples.

Costs of Participation

One of the goals of the Food Stamp E&T Program is to invest resources in a way that will increase participants' self-sufficiency, reduce their dependence on food stamps and thereby reduce food stamp costs. As in any public program, efficient use of resources requires that they be targeted where they will achieve the greatest impact for the least cost. In order to do this Federal and State E&T planners and program managers must have information that enables them to identify needs so that they can develop strategies to meet them. One indicator of a household's need for E&T resources is the value of the food stamp allotments they receive over time.

The total value of allotments provided to work registrant households during the 33-month observation period is shown in Exhibit 4. Total allotments valued at more than a half-million dollars (\$517,094) were provided to households in Alabama, while work registrant households in Washington received allotments totalling \$255,978. Households in Alabama received an average of \$1,127 during the period, somewhat larger than the \$911 in coupons received by their counterparts in Washington.

Exhibit 4

Total Cost Per Case by Pattern of Participation

	Alabama	Washington
ALL CASES:		
Value of All Allotments	\$517,094	\$255,978
Average Per Case	\$1,127	\$911
N	459	281
SINGLE-SPELL CASES:		
<u>Single Spell 1-3 Mos.</u>		
Value of All Allotments	\$41,110	\$20,896
Average Per Case	\$215	\$255
Percentage of Sample	41.6%	29.2%
Percentage of Allotments	8.0%	8.2%
<u>Single Spell 4-6 Mos.</u>		
Value of All Allotments	\$41,813	\$31,505
Average Per Case	\$589	\$470
Percentage of Sample	15.5%	23.8%
Percentage of Allotments	8.1%	12.3%
<u>Single Spell > 6 Mos.</u>		
Value of All Allotments	\$213,998	\$74,653
Average Per Case	\$3,014	\$2,018
Percentage of Sample	15.5%	13.2%
Percentage of Allotments	41.4%	29.2%
MULTIPLE-SPELL CASES:		
Value of All Allotments	\$220,173	\$128,924
Average Per Case	\$1,747	\$1,357
Percentage of Sample	27.5%	33.8%
Percentage of Allotments	42.6%	50.4%

It is apparent from the data in Exhibit 4 that multiple-spell households in both States received the largest share of allotments provided to work-registrant households in the study samples. While this group imposed the greatest absolute cost, a smaller group of households, those involving a long single spell, were more costly to serve. This type of household received allotments that totaled, on average, more than \$3,000 in Alabama and more than \$2,000 in Washington. In Alabama, the total of these costs was almost as large as that incurred from cases that experienced multiple spells.

These findings indicate that average total allotment costs are greatest for households experiencing long single spells, but the largest share of allotment costs is attributable to multiple-spell households. This pattern suggests that the group of work registrant households which experiences more than one spell is considerably larger than the group which experiences a single long spell. In fact, as shown in Exhibit 4, this is the case. Although single-spell cases lasting more than 6 months in Alabama, for example, account for only 15.5 percent of the sample of work-registrant households that entered the program in early 1986, they accounted for 41.4 percent of the total cost of allotments provided to households in the sample through late 1988. Similarly, only 13.2 percent of the sample from Washington had long single spells, but they received 29.2 percent of the food stamp allotments to sample households from that State.

E. CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study, based on a longitudinal analysis of a unique entry cohort sample, yield some new perspectives concerning work registrants' participation in the Food Stamp Program. In this section, we offer some concluding observations concerning the significance of the study's findings and potential implications for administrators of the Food Stamp Program and State Employment and Training (E&T) programs. We also point to areas for further research that may help confirm the findings of this exploratory study.

Patterns of Participation by Work Registrants

Most of the work registrant households examined in this study received food stamps for six months or less, left the program, and did not return during the observation period (2-2.5 years). Even though such households constituted a majority of the work registrant households that began receiving food stamps during early 1986 in the study sites, they consumed a relatively small proportion of the total food stamp allotments provided to this group. In Alabama, they represented 57 percent of the sample, but accounted for only 16

percent of the total allotment cost. Similarly, in Washington, they made up nearly 53 percent of the sample, but received only 20 percent of the food stamp allotments.

The largest share of food stamp allotments provided to work registrant households in this study was consumed by households that experienced multiple spells within two to two and a half years after initially being certified. Although such cases do not represent more than a third of the work registrants who began receiving food stamps during the study period, they consumed nearly half (42.6 percent in Alabama and 50.4 percent in Washington) of the total food stamp allotments provided to sample households over the 33-month study period.

The group that imposed the greatest cost per household on the Food Stamp Program were cases that experienced a single spell lasting more than six months. Even though these cases constituted only 15.5 percent of the sample in Alabama and 13.2 percent of the sample in Washington, they consumed, respectively, 41.4 percent and 29.2 percent of the total allotments to sample work registrant households.

Opportunities for Targeting Employment and Training Resources

Some State and local food stamp agencies have had success targeting Quality Control error-reduction programs on certain types of households by means of error-prone profiles (see Usher and Duncan, 1985). However, the impact of individual and household characteristics on patterns of participation appears to be weak. As a result, targeting job search or other E&T services to particular types of work registrants or their households might entail a rather high degree of error.

A very appealing alternative to targeting on the basis of personal or household characteristics was suggested by the pattern of cost data that emerged from this study. Our findings may encourage the adoption of "self-selection" as an efficient means of targeting job search and E&T services on work registrants who are likely to impose the greatest cost on the Food Stamp Program. The approach would involve a very simple screening process based on two criteria. First, how long has an initially certified work registrant been participating in the program? When work-registrant households reach the sixth month of an initial spell, it would be appropriate, if the findings of this study are confirmed by a larger scale study, to target them for special attention. Given that such households are most at risk of enduring a long and costly spell, special intervention at this point might be appropriate.

Similarly, during all application interviews with work registrant households, eligibility specialists could ascertain whether the household had participated before and been required to register for work. Again, based on our findings concerning multiple-spell cases, it might be cost-effective to monitor more carefully the job search efforts of such work registrants.

Further Research

Our research revealed very similar patterns of participation and program costs across samples drawn from two quite different States. If these findings are supported by larger scale studies, they might provide the basis for a strategy to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the work registration and job search process. The OBRA data base already provides a foundation for longitudinal analysis of cross-sectional samples of the food stamp work registrant caseload. Soon, the E&T evaluation will offer more up-to-date information, although not involving as length a followup period.

The usefulness of a longitudinal analysis of an entry cohort lies in the fact that it allows analyses of spell lengths by the sequence of the spell, as well as analysis of multiple spells. Our findings suggest that the multiple-spell pattern of dependency may be fairly common, and more important, households which return for two or more spells are responsible for a large share of allotment costs. Again, recognizing the cost implications, awareness of the sequence of a household's spell may be useful information for program planners and field staff to have in deciding how to allocate staff time and other E&T resources.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. BACKGROUND

This report presents the findings of an exploratory study concerning participation in the Food Stamp Program by work registrants. Since the early 1970s, certain members of households that apply for food stamps have had to register with the Employment Service (ES) and meet other requirements such as job search or workfare in order to establish and maintain their eligibility for assistance.* These persons are generally able-bodied, non-elderly adults who do not have primary responsibility for the care of children or disabled persons living in their household. It is reasonable, therefore, that they should seek employment to provide income that would assist the household in meeting its nutritional needs.

This viewpoint is consistent with work requirements that were incorporated into other programs even before the Food Stamp Program was established. Over the years, however, opinions about the cost-effectiveness of work requirements and work programs for low-income persons have changed. Whereas previous policies were concerned with "work incentives," more recent policy debates have focused on creating "dependency disincentives." As a result, Congress has enacted changes in work requirements that reflect these changes in perspective. Therefore, implicit in past and current work requirements is the expectation that households with work registrants should only resort to food stamps to cushion the impact of temporary economic dislocations.

Consistent with this "safety net" perspective on income assistance, long term participation in the Food Stamp Program is seen as inconsistent with the latent capability of work registrants to provide for their household's nutritional needs through gainful employment. Nevertheless, even though work registrants, by definition, do not face some of the barriers to employment that confront other participants in the Food Stamp Program, some evidence suggests that a segment of this group becomes dependent on food stamps. For example, in spite of job search requirements and other efforts by State food stamp agencies to encourage work registrants to become employed,

*An historical overview of the evolution of work requirements in the Food Stamp Program may be found in a recent report by Abt Associates (1988).

Burstein and Visser (1989) estimated that the average spell of participation by work registrants between 1980 and 1983 was 14.5 months, not a great deal shorter than the 17.6 months for the caseload as a whole. Similarly, they found that the median duration of spells was not very different, 5 to 6 months for work registrants versus 6 to 7 months for the entire caseload.

Data from other sources suggest that the characteristics of work registrants whose households participate for a relatively long period differ systematically from those who receive assistance for shorter periods. For example, results from the Work Registration/Job Search Demonstration Project sponsored by the Food and Nutrition Service (see FNS, 1986: 28) indicated that the age, race, educational attainment, and work experience of work registrants affected the rate at which they left the project. Similarly, Mirsky and Holmdahl (1987) found that larger work registrant households seemed to be less likely to leave the Food Stamp Program than smaller households.

In reviewing studies of work registrants' participation in the Food Stamp Program, it is important to recognize the characteristics of the data on which they are based. Given the complexity of analyzing program participation over time, these characteristics affect the interpretations we lend to the findings (see Gogan, 1988). For example, longitudinal analyses of cross-sectional samples tend to produce inflated estimates of spell lengths because such samples include a larger proportion of long term participants than is actually representative of the households that ever receive food stamps. Some other data bases, such as the State Data Systems files, cannot capture lapses in participation between observations, or like the Panel Study of Income Dynamics, rely on the respondent's recollection of program participation over the 12 months prior to the interview. Therefore, while each data base and analytical approach offers a unique and useful perspective, none provides the basis for definitive conclusions about patterns of participation.

B. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Although more information has recently become available about households' participation in the Food Stamp Program over time, a number of important questions remain, particularly with regard to work registrants. First, it is not clear how extensive long term participation is among work registrants. Whereas Burstein and Visser (1989) report a median spell of 5-6 months, work registrant

households in the control group of the Food Stamp Workfare Demonstration Project had spells with a median duration of 4 months (Urban Institute, 1987: 8). Yet, an FNS analysis (1986: 31) of data from the Integrated Quality Control System indicated an average length of stay of 8.1 months for work registrants. A discussion later in this chapter will show that, more than anything else, the variation in these estimates is due to the design of the data bases from which they were derived.

Second, long-term dependency on the Food Stamp Program, particularly for work registrants, may follow patterns that are different from those exhibited by participants in income assistance programs that have categorical eligibility criteria. One pattern is continuous participation over a relatively long period. Another pattern would be a series of relatively short spells separated by periods of nonparticipation. Both reflect long term dependency, but of two distinct types. Both types of long term participants are likely to consume a great deal of resources (both in benefits and in administrative costs), and therefore, need to be identified and studied.

A third question is whether employment and training services can be targeted more efficiently and effectively toward long term work registrants. If a significant proportion of work registrants tends to become dependent on the Food Stamp Program, it may be possible to develop strategies to reduce the costs associated with long term participation. In order to move toward this objective, however, we must first demonstrate on at least a preliminary basis that some work registrants do, in fact, become dependent on food stamps and generate substantial program costs.

Consistent with the questions outlined above, this study was undertaken to address the following specific objectives:

- to describe patterns of participation in the Food Stamp Program by an entry cohort of work registrants who were subject to a meaningful work requirement;
- to assess the extent of long term participation by work registrants, in terms of both long single spells and a series of spells; and
- to measure the allotment costs for work registrants, according to the patterns of participation they exhibit.

The following section discusses some important research that has already been done concerning these issues. Based on our review of that work, we felt that it was necessary to collect original data in order to meet the objectives outlined above. The specific approach we chose, an analysis of an entry cohort of work registrant households, affords a perspective that has not been available concerning food stamp participation over time. It is described in Chapter II.

C. RESEARCH ON FOOD STAMP PROGRAM WORK REGISTRANTS

Several data bases contain information about Food Stamp Program participants that is potentially useful in the study of long term participation by work registrants. They include data collected in:

- an evaluation of the impact of the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1981 (OBRA) on the Food Stamp Program;
- the State Data Systems project (SDS, also referred to as the State Automated Eligibility System [SAES]);
- the Food Stamp Workfare demonstration projects; and
- the Work Registration and Job Search Demonstration Project.

Two other sources of data include nationally representative panels of individuals and households that include relatively large subsamples of low-income persons. They are the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID), developed by the Institute for Social Research (ISR) at the University of Michigan, and the ongoing Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), conducted by the Bureau of the Census. Most of the research that is pertinent to this study drew on one or more of these data bases, and it is this work on which our discussion of the literature is focused.

Patterns of Dependency

Until very recently, much more effort had been devoted to research concerning long term dependency in AFDC than to research in food stamps dependency. This research is not very helpful for this study, however, because we would expect patterns of participation in the Food Stamp Program to be different from the patterns observed in the AFDC Program (except for public assistance food stamp households) due to basic differences in recipient characteristics that arise from eligibility criteria used in the two programs. First, the

length of spells of participation in the Food Stamp Program, particularly for work registrants, tends to be shorter than reciprocity spells in the AFDC program. Whereas Bane and Ellwood (1983) calculated a mean spell of AFDC reciprocity of 4.7 years, research sponsored by FNS (Burstein and Visser, 1989) reported an average length of stay in the Food Stamp Program of 17.6 months for the entire caseload and 14.5 months for work registrants.

The contrast between AFDC and food stamp participation spells is even sharper if, because of the highly skewed distribution of completed spells, the median length of participation is used as the measure of central tendency. Bane and Ellwood (1983) measured the median AFDC spell as slightly more than two years, but the distribution of spells for the general food stamp caseload, based on OBRA data, indicates a median spell of approximately seven months (Burstein and Visser, 1989). Therefore, although the research concerning AFDC reciprocity offered some lessons in the dynamics of program participation, it is apparent that the briefer spells of participation in the Food Stamp Program require special attention and the use of data bases that offer precise month-to-month measures of participation.

As we noted above, the duration of food stamp spells for work registrants tends to be even shorter than that of the general caseload. The estimates in the literature range from a median of 4 months (Urban Institute, 1987) to a mean of 8.1 months (FNS, 1986). As a result, the need for reliable monthly data on participation is especially great in examining participation by this group. The OBRA data base includes all spells of food stamp receipt that were completed between October 1980 and December 1983 for a sample of more than 6,600 households (Urban Institute, 1985). Given its size and the span of time it encompasses, this a rich source of data related to food stamp participation by work registrants.

Based on an analysis of OBRA data, FNS concluded in the statement of work for this project (p. 10) that "it is not unreasonable to assume that 40 percent of those currently work registered may have been on the [Food Stamp Program] for 2 years or more." Although this seems to run counter to what is implied by the relatively brief work registrant spells described above, it is important to recognize certain features of the OBRA data base in order to understand the source of what may seem to be a contradiction.

The OBRA design poses two analytical problems. One problem is right censoring, or the truncation of data at the end of the 39-month data collection period. This is a problem common to many longitudinal studies, but easily addressed by the use of life tables analysis. More important in terms of the issues of interest in this study, is the censoring of data at the beginning of the period (left-censoring), and the problem of length-biased sampling. The OBRA data are censored at the beginning of the observation period in two ways. First, rather than determining the actual date of initiation for spells that were in progress in October, 1980 (the beginning of the observation period), the date of the most recent recertification was used to mark the beginning of such spells. This means that the maximum length of time that spells were observed before October 1980 was eleven months; i.e., the earliest date of the beginning of any spell was November 1979. Nevertheless, some of the spells in progress on October 1980 had begun earlier. As a result, the lengths of these spells are unknown.

The second form of left censoring that occurs in the OBRA database arises from the selection of a 39-month period of observation that is arbitrary with respect to the actual initiation (and termination) of spells of Food Stamp participation. This means that, in addition to the problem just described, the sample also does not include cases that began and ended before the start of the observation period. Like some of the cases included in the sample, these missing cases also began prior to the observation period; but unlike the spells included in the sample, the missing cases ended earlier--before October 1980. These missed cases thus tend to have spells of shorter durations, and the results of omitting such cases is that the sample overrepresents longer spells, biasing the mean duration to be longer than the actual mean.

The problems arising from left-censoring are much more difficult to correct than right-censoring effects. In fact, efforts to develop methods for recovering the "true" distribution of spells from left-censored data have not been successful. In the strictest sense, the only way to avoid problems of left-censoring in longitudinal research is to carry out studies with entry cohorts. The OBRA data base, in contrast, is actually a series of cross-sectional samples of monthly caseloads of food stamp participants. Thus, the only way an entry cohort could be approximated using this data base would be to conduct an analysis that involved only cases with no censored spells. While this would not alter the basic nature of the data base, it would provide information that has fewer biases than results based on the

full sample of cases involving left- and right-censored spells. Also, by focusing on cases rather than spells, this approach offers some insight into the incidence of multiple spells and the duration of spells of different sequence.

At our request, FNS made arrangements for Abt Associates, a contractor involved in ongoing analyses of the OBRA data base, to conduct a series of analyses according to specifications that allowed us to compare the frequency and duration of spells for four groups of work registrants. These groups were defined by the presence or absence of censored spells, and the type of censoring (left, right, or both). The data shown in Exhibit I.1, which pertain to cases whose observed spells were not censored, were culled from data provided by Abt Associates (see memoranda from Nancy Burstein, dated November 23, 1987, and December 16, 1987).

These estimates of the duration of work registrants' spells are quite different from those based on all work registrant spells in the OBRA sample. The median length of each case's first (though not necessarily initial) spell is estimated to be four months and the mean spell length is 6.7 months. Both figures are considerably shorter than estimates for the full sample of work registrant spells (median spell of approximately 6 months and mean duration of 14 months). Also, although they are not shown in the exhibit, estimates of the duration of spells for censored cases are, as we would expect, generally double those of uncensored cases.

Another potentially significant finding reflected in Exhibit I.1 is that while nearly three-fourths of the uncensored cases experienced only one spell during the OBRA observation period, the remaining cases undertook as many as four additional spells. Also, for work registrant households that experienced two spells, the second spell tended to be approximately 35 percent longer than the first spell. Similarly, the second and third spells of households with three spells were successively longer (means of 3.3, 4.0, and 5.2 months), perhaps indicating movement toward increasing dependency.

These results are significant in terms of the assumptions underlying this study. First, they imply that the duration of work registrants' spells may not be as lengthy as other research suggests. Second, the frequency and pattern of multiple spells observed among uncensored work registrant cases in the OBRA data base supports our assertion

Exhibit I.1

Duration of Work Registrant Spells: Uncensored OBRA Cases

Number of Spells		Sequence		
		1st	2nd	3rd
1	Mean	6.7		
	N	545		
	s	6.7		
	Md	4		
2	Mean	4.9	6.6	
	N	144	144	
	s	4.1	5.6	
	Md	3	5	
3	Mean	3.3	4	5.2
	N	32	32	32
	s	2.3	3.4	3.8
	Md	3	3	4.5

This table by created by RTI from an analysis of data conducted by Abt Associates. Seven cases with more than three spells are excluded.

Mean : mean duration of spells
 N : number of spells
 s : standard deviation
 Md : median duration of spells

that this is a potentially significant pattern of long term participation among work registrant households. Finally, insights afforded by results from the OBRA data encouraged us to adopt an entry-cohort design so that we could focus on the duration and frequency of spells for work registrant households without having to deal with the analytical problems posed by length-biased sampling.

**Linking Work
Registrant
Characteristics
to Patterns of
Participation**

Several efforts have been made to link the characteristics of work registrants and their households to the patterns of participation they exhibit. In this section we will review several studies, one involving the State Data Systems data base, two based on demonstration projects sponsored by FNS, and one based on an analysis of data from the Survey of Income and Program Participation.

Findings Based on State Data Systems. A recent analysis of work registrants was conducted with data derived from a database constructed from automated eligibility files from Alabama, Florida, Missouri, and New York (see Mirsky and Holmdahl, 1987). By examining the status of food stamp cases at two or three points in time, it was possible for the researchers to compare the characteristics of short- and long-term work registrant households. In summary, Mirsky and Holmdahl (1987: 37) reported higher program exit rates for "households that:

- . have a male head of household;
- . are smaller;
- . consist of only one person;
- . receive smaller benefits;
- . have fewer children; and
- . have a lower proportion [of] households with public assistance income."

These findings generally suggest that it is more difficult for work registrants in larger households to obtain employment that will produce sufficient income to make their households ineligible for benefits. It may be the case that work registrants from larger households are just as likely to obtain employment, but the size of their household makes it possible to be employed and remain eligible for Food Stamps.

Further analysis of SDS was conducted under this study to examine changes in the allotment for large and small Food Stamp work registrant households (see the memorandum from Mathematica Policy Research [MPR] dated January 11, 1988). Following specifications provided by RTI, MPR analysts found that changes in employment status and earnings are similar for work registrants in large and small households, but the impact tends to be a smaller allotment for large households and ineligibility for small households. This provided a possible explanation for the earlier finding that larger work registrant households tend to remain on the Program longer than small households.

Findings Based on Demonstration Projects. FNS has sponsored two demonstration projects to test work requirements in the Food Stamp Program. The Workfare project actually entailed two sets of projects conducted between 1979 and 1981 that tested the cost-effectiveness of the workfare concept in the Food Stamp Program. The Work Registration and Job Search Demonstration Project was implemented in 1981 and continued into 1984. Evaluations of both the Workfare and Work Registration/Job Search demonstration projects indicated that as many as 70 percent of the work registrants involved in those studies had significant recent work experience (FNS, 1986: 24). Consistent with the research described above, this relatively strong attachment to the labor force would seem to contribute to brief spells of participation (recall that work registrants in the control group for the Workfare projects had median spells of four months [Urban Institute, 1987: 8]. They also suggest, however, that the relatively few work registrants who have not been employed in the months prior to becoming participants in the Food Stamp Program may find it difficult to find jobs as quickly or to acquire employment that provides enough income for them to leave the program.

The results of the Workfare project also indicate that work registrants with recent work experience and with more work experience tended to leave workfare and to cease participation in the Food Stamp Program more quickly than others (OAE, 1986: 28). This seemed to be the key factor, regardless of whether the work registrant was male or female; however, the age, education, and race of the work registrant also affected duration of participation. Older work registrants, those who were not white, and those who had less formal education were more likely to remain on the Program for a longer period.

Results Based on the Survey of Income and Program Participation. Data from the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) tend to confirm some of findings from the demonstration described above. Specifically, SIPP data indicate that a large proportion of participants in the Food Stamp Program enter the program with significant work experience, although many lack much formal education. If work experience is a key factor that enables work registrants to return quickly to the labor force, these findings may provide a partial explanation for the short spells of food stamp participation observed among work registrants. The following discussion summarizes a recent analysis of SIPP that provided new information about the education, training, and work experience of food stamp recipients.

SIPP collects longitudinal monthly information on economic and household characteristics and participation in income assistance programs over a period of two and one-half years for nationally representative samples impaneled in 1984, 1985 and 1986. The survey follows adult sample members throughout this period, and includes in the study persons who join the households of the sampled individuals or into whose households the sample members move. Interviews are conducted every four months, collecting data regarding the previous four months (referred to collectively as a wave); in the case of income and program participation, information is ascertained with regard to each of the previous four months.

Following specifications provided by RTI, MPR conducted an analysis of SIPP data that are the basis of the findings we report below. One part of the analysis was a summary of educational and training programs in which current Food Stamp recipients participate and the training that they have received in the past. This analysis used data from the topical modules (along with core data) from Wave 3 of the 1984 panel.

To examine the extent to which food stamp participants vary in their work experience and education, job training, and public assistance status, we conducted some further analysis of data provided by MPR. As seen in Exhibit I.2, a large proportion of food stamp participants in the SIPP sample had substantial work experience. Furthermore, the group of food stamp participants most likely to include work registrants (that is, those not receiving public assistance) were more likely to have substantial work experience than participants who were

Exhibit I.2

Percentage of Food Stamp Recipients with Substantial Work Experience by Receipt of Public Assistance, Education and Job Training Status*

Participant's Education and Job Training	Participants With No Public Assistance Income	Participants With Public Assistance Income	All Participants	N
No High School	73%	56%	65%	4,181
High School	82%	80%	81%	3,605
No Job Training	76%	63%	70%	6,149
Job Training	84%	80%	82%	1,637
Total	77%	67%	72%	7,786
	3,894	3,892		

*Includes only adults recipients aged 18-59; "substantial work experience" means the person has worked at a job or business for six consecutive months or longer. Public assistance includes AFDC and GA. Table created by Research Triangle Institute from 1984 SIPP data provided by Mathematica Policy Research.

receiving public assistance (77 percent vs. 67 percent). Food stamp participants who lacked a high school degree were less likely to have worked six consecutive months or longer than those with a high school degree. And those without job training also were less likely to have worked than participants with job training. Thus, the groups least likely to have work experience are participants receiving public assistance who lack a high school degree (56 percent) or who have no job training (63 percent).

All three factors are considered simultaneously in Exhibit I.3. Within the four education-training categories, those not on public assistance are slightly more likely to have work experience than those on public assistance. Among participants with neither high school degrees nor job training, only 54 percent of those on public assistance have worked, while 73 percent of those not on public assistance have held substantial jobs. For both subgroups, work experience increases with each increment in education or job training. But, for those on public assistance, the increase in the level of work experience between those with the least preparation (no high school degree and no job training) and the next step up (no high school, but job training) was much larger--from 54 percent to 72 percent.

Conclusion

Research on work registrants' participation in the Food Stamp Program has advanced considerably in recent years. The studies we have reviewed provide a variety of insights concerning this issue, but the questions outlined under the objectives of this study remain to be answered. Unfortunately, the data available from previous research and from ongoing efforts such as SIPP and PSID cannot answer them. As a result, it was necessary to collect original data in order to address some of these unresolved issues.

D. OVERVIEW OF THE REPORT

The following is a brief summary of the focus of the remaining chapters of this report:

Chapter II presents an overview of the research methods employed in this study. This study is unique in that it involved tracking an entry cohort of work registrant households for nearly three years following their initial application for food stamps in Alabama and Washington.

Exhibit I.3

Percentage of Food Stamp Recipients with Substantial Work Experience by Receipt of Public Assistance, Education and Job Training Status*

High School Degree/ Job Training	Participants With No Public Assistance Income	Participants With Public Assistance Income	All Participants	N
No/No	73%	54%	65%	4,181
No/Yes	76%	72%	73%	3,605
Yes/No	80%	78%	79%	1,637
Yes/Yes	87%	84%	86%	6,149
Total	77%	67%	72%	7,786

*Includes only adults recipients aged 18-59; "substantial work experience" means the person has worked at a job or business for six consecutive months or longer. Public assistance includes AFDC and GA. Table created by Research Triangle Institute from 1984 SIPP data provided by Mathematica Policy Research.

Chapter III addresses the internal and external validity of this study. An important issue in this regard is the nature of the work requirements to which work registrants in the study were subject. Another issue concerns the characteristics of work registrants and households selected for this study. This information provides perspective on the work registrants and food stamp households in the study sample, and enables us to compare them to nationally representative samples.

Chapter IV presents a longitudinal analysis of participation in the Food Stamp Program by work registrants. Our findings describe patterns of participation and the costs of participation.

Chapter V presents the conclusions we have drawn, based on the findings reported in earlier chapters. These conclusions relate to two broad sets of issues. First, do the results of this study point to opportunities for targeting employment and training resources on particular types of work registrants? Second, how far can the results of this study be extended, and how can FNS build on it?

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. OVERVIEW

The complexity of the issue examined in this study and the dearth of reliable data pertaining to it required an exploratory study. Although the need for the proposed research is premised on certain analyses of available data, the limitations of those data make it difficult to draw firm conclusions from them. As a recent Food and Nutrition Service report noted (FNS, 1986: 28), "There are no adequate sources of information for estimating length of [Food Stamp Program] participation and turnover."

The research design developed for this study involved taking samples of work registrants who initially entered the Food Stamp Program in Alabama and the State of Washington during the first half of 1986. Data were collected in two localities in each State. The history of participation for households in these groups was followed through the fall of 1988 by manually abstracting food stamp and Employment Service (ES) case record data.

An advantage of this design is that it permits a followup of a defined group of work registrants (i.e., a sample that is representative of registrants entering the program during a specific time period and in specific localities) from the beginning of their participation through a defined period. It also avoids the upwardly biased estimates of spell length that occur in longitudinal analysis of cross-sectional samples because long-term cases tend to be over-represented. The use of an entry cohort, in contrast, provides findings that are representative of the broader group of cases that enters the program during a given period. As a result, it provides unique insight into the potential problem of multiple spells as a special pattern of long-term dependency.

The primary purpose of the analysis of the case record and survey data is to determine the duration of spells and patterns of participation of an entry cohort of work registrants over as many as 33 months. Because some spells are in progress at the end of data collection (i.e., they are right-censored), life table techniques are needed to avoid truncation bias. Life table analyses have been performed for each of the first, second and higher order spells of food stamp participation.

This chapter provides a summary of certain features of the research design and an overview of how it was implemented. We begin with a description of the selection of study sites and subjects, and proceed to a discussion of data collection activities.

B. SELECTION OF STUDY SITES

Of the 7,101,000 households estimated to be participating in the Food Stamp Program in an average month in the summer of 1986, 921,000 (13.0 percent) contained a member who was required to register for work (FNS, 1988: 82). This amounts to 1,611,000 persons, or 8.3 of all the participants in the Program at that time (FNS, 1988: 83). The proposed study was not designed to be representative of all these work registrants; rather, our intention was to develop four probability samples that are representative of all work registrant households that initially entered the Food Stamp Program in four localities, two in Alabama and two in Washington, in early 1986. This approach was consistent with the exploratory nature of the study and its resource limitations. It also enabled us to identify and assess the impact of important contextual factors, such as the nature of the work registration/job search requirement as it actually was implemented. The rationale for selecting these four sites and the basis for selecting individual cases are discussed below.

Selection of States

Under the approach we implemented, two States were chosen to be different in terms of:

- characteristics of the work registrant caseload (e.g., with respect to the proportion of participants required to register, of work registrant households comprising only one person, of household receiving AFDC, and of work registrants receiving GA payments);
- administration of work requirements; and
- socioeconomic milieu.

The two States that agreed to participate in the study represent two distinct types with regard to characteristics of their work registrant cases. One group of States exhibits the following characteristics:

- a small proportion (generally fewer than 5 percent) of Food Stamp participants are required to register;

- a large proportion (generally 40 percent or more) of work registrant households contain only one person;
- a large proportion (one-fourth or more) of work registrants receive General Assistance (GA) payments; and
- a large proportion (45 percent or more) of Food Stamp households receive AFDC.

The states that conform to this pattern include California, Connecticut, Delaware, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. These nine states comprise a large segment of the national Food Stamp caseload and are large urbanized States. Several other States show three of these characteristics, but not all four. They include Hawaii, Maryland, Minnesota, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Washington, and Wisconsin. Generally, they also tend to be industrialized, relatively affluent States.

Another group of States that includes Arizona, Kentucky, Louisiana, New Mexico, and Oklahoma exhibits a different pattern. Among these states:

- a relatively large proportion (10 percent or more) of Food Stamp participants are required to register;
- a relatively small proportion (fewer than 20 percent in most states) of work registrant households contain only one person;
- very few, if any work registrants receive GA payments; and
- a relatively small proportion (in most states, fewer than one-fourth) of the Food Stamp households receive AFDC.

Alabama, Arkansas, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Texas tend to fit the same pattern, except that a relatively small proportion of Food Stamp participants in those States are required to register.

While recognizing that the present study is exploratory, selecting one State of each type tends to reveal information about two distinct types of work registrants. A sample drawn from the first type of State is more likely to include the one-person GA household, whereas a sample drawn from the second type will include more families. It would not be surprising to find that the patterns of participation for these two groups

are different. Therefore, we have structured the sample in such a way that this variation in work registrant characteristics is explicitly incorporated.

The other critical factor to consider in selecting study sites is the history of work requirements. We assumed that work registrants were more likely to be subject to an ongoing work requirement from 1986-1988 if they resided in States that had contracts with the Employment Service (ES) to administer job search prior to the implementation of the Food Stamp Employment and Training Program in April 1987. Therefore, it was necessary to determine if each of the States listed above had such a contract.

Considering three sets of factors--fitting one of the two types of States described above, history of work requirements, and having two localities with Food Stamp caseloads of at least 8,000 households--produced two lists. The list of States fitting the first type described above included:

- . California
- . Minnesota
- . New Jersey
- . New York
- . Washington

The list fitting the second type includes:

- . Alabama
- . Arizona
- . Oklahoma
- . South Carolina
- . Texas

Following a series of contacts with each of these States, Alabama and Washington were selected to participate and officials in both States made arrangements for local Food Stamp offices to participate.

Selection of Localities

The local study sites included Jefferson and Montgomery Counties in Alabama and two Community Service Offices (CSOs) in the service areas of Washington. The study design was strengthened by taking samples of work registrants from four sites. This provided a minimal degree of replication among the sample of sites. Lacking this replication within a State, it would be very difficult to rule out site

factors as a primary causal factor in the analysis of long term participation by work registrants.

C. SELECTION OF WORK REGISTRANTS

State welfare officials in Alabama and Washington provided computerized listings of households that initially entered the Food Stamp Program in the local study sites during January through June 1986. The list for Jefferson and Montgomery Counties in Alabama contained only initially certified households for that period. Complete case record data were obtained for 459 of 500 cases originally sampled in those counties, a 91.8 percent completion rate.

Once the study was in the field, we determined that the lists provided by Washington State contained all work registrant cases that were active in the Kelso and Vancouver offices during January-June 1986. It was necessary, therefore, to use the listing of new cases numbers issued during that period to identify initially certified households. As a result, we had to include in the study every work registrant household that first entered the program during that time period in order to achieve as large a sample as possible. This produced a total sample of 283 households (actually the universe of initially certified work registrant households for this time period).

D. DATA COLLECTION ACTIVITIES

Individual and Household-Level Data

The body of data employed in this study was obtained from food stamp and ES case records. Data collection in the four localities involved an abstraction of case record data for more than 740 food stamp work registrant cases that were initially certified in early 1986. These data were used to create a history of Food Stamp Program participation for each case. The basic structure of the abstraction form is similar to the form RTI used in its AFDC OBRA study (Griffith and Usher, 1986) and the form Market Facts, Inc. used in the Food Stamp OBRA Study (see Urban Institute, 1985b); i.e., a basic record was established for the initial month of participation and supplementary change forms were used to record changes over the life of the case. The following sections describe our basic approach to case record abstraction.

Food Stamp Case Record Abstraction. Case records can provide a thorough and accurate month-to-month record of the participation of households in the Food Stamp Program. However, these records contain only information that is directly relevant to the determination

of a household's eligibility for Food Stamps. Therefore, information that would be of interest to researchers is not routinely collected because they are not required for determining eligibility. Nevertheless, the information required to determine eligibility for food stamps (e.g., detailed information on earned and unearned income, household size and composition) must be recorded and updated on a monthly basis (as a result of either monthly reports or reports by participants in conformance with the requirement that all food stamp households report changes in circumstance that might affect their allotment or basic eligibility).

Our approach to data collection began with the construction of a basic case history from initial application in 1986 through October 1988. This chronology was recorded on a food stamp case record data abstraction form, the Summary of Participation (a copy of this and other data collection forms can be found in the appendix). After this overview was constructed, the characteristics of the case at initial application were recorded on a separate form. Then, a color-coded change form was completed for any month in which an interim change, recertification, termination, or re-application was noted on the data abstraction form. Thus, any change in circumstance associated with a change in coupon allotment or basic eligibility was recorded.

The data on the Food Stamp case record data abstraction form provided essential information for the longitudinal analyses of participation presented in this report. Basic information about income, household composition, and other factors shown on these instruments was available in most of the Alabama and Washington case records we reviewed.

Employment Service Case Record Abstraction. Employment Service (ES) records for sample work registrant provided information about their job search activities and compliance with work registration and job search requirements. These records also contain data about work registrants' education (years of school and attainment of a General Equivalency Degree [GED]) and recent work history. This information supplements data in the food stamp case record and is helpful in determining which work registrants actually engaged in job search.

Several factors restricted our access to ES case records for work registrants in the sample. First, the ES in both States has moved to higher levels of automation of records, thereby reducing the need for

hard copy files. In Washington, for example, the establishment of the JobNet computer-based information system resulted in the destruction of some dated case record material. Second, separate files were maintained for each work registrant for each year encompassed by the observation period. As a result, long term participants could have as many as three separate ES case folders, one for each fiscal year. Finally, unlike food stamp records, ES staff have little need to access work registrant case records after a case is terminated. As a result, little effort is devoted to maintaining these files.

The net effect of these problems was that ES data were available for 81.5 percent of the work registrants in Alabama and approximately 60 percent of those in the Washington sample. Using food stamp case record data, we compared the work registrants and households for which ES data were available with those for whom no data were obtained. They did not appear to be significantly different. Nevertheless, results for Washington in particular should be interpreted with this in mind.

**Program
Operations**

To obtain firsthand information about the implementation of the work registration and job search process in the study sites, we conducted a series of interviews by telephone and in person with food stamp and ES officials in Alabama and Washington. These contacts included officials at the State level, as well as managers and line staff in local food stamp and ES offices. We were fortunate in that most of these persons had experience that spanned the period from 1986 to the present. As a result, they were able to offer insights concerning practices prior to implementation of the Food Stamp Employment and Training (E&T) Program in 1986, as well as the transition to E&T.

E. SUMMARY

This study is unique in that it involves a nearly three-year follow-up of an entry cohort of work registrants. The Food Stamp Program participation data on which it is based could not have been obtained by any means other than the manual case record abstraction it involved. The linkage of these data with ES service data also is unique in that it affords an opportunity to assess the actual nature of the work requirement imposed on work registrants in the study sites.

III. CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

The data for this study were collected at four local welfare offices, two located in Alabama and two located in the State of Washington. Using lists provided by the respective State food stamp agencies, we drew samples of cases (households) that met two criteria. First, the household's initial certification had to have occurred between January and June, 1986. Second, the household had to include a work registrant.

Given the scope of this study, it is apparent that it is exploratory. Nevertheless, the group of cases we selected from each local office was either a probability sample or the universe of work registrants whose households were initially certified to receive food stamps in early 1986. As such, each set of cases is representative of the study population in each of the four sites during the study period. However, these samples are not sufficient, individually or in combination, to make broader inferences about work registrants who participated elsewhere, or who entered the program during other periods.

In Chapter II, we presented the rationale for selecting the States and localities included in this study. By having selected States that we expected to be different, but representative of broader sets of States, our hope is that similar findings may emerge in spite of those differences, and that the similarities may point to areas that merit further investigation or suggest ways of targeting food stamp employment and training program resources. Although this is the limit of any claim to generalizability that we can make for this study, the appendix provides more detailed information about each site that will enable readers to judge how the findings of the study may be affected by the settings, the nature of the work registration/job search process in those settings, and the characteristics of the study subjects.

The remainder of this chapter addresses two major issues related to the internal and external validity of this study. First, in light of our objective to examine work registrants' participation in the face of a meaningful work requirement, we need to assess whether this actually was the case in the study sites. Of special concern is how quickly the work registration/job search (WR/JS) process got underway for each work registrant, whether the work registrant complied with work requirements, and how carefully the Employment Service (ES) and the food stamp office monitored compliance. Collectively, these characteristics of the WR/JS process define the work requirement that was imposed on the study subjects.

The second issue we discuss in this chapter concerns characteristics of the work registrants selected in the samples in Alabama and Washington. Although a detailed description of them may be found in the appendix, the discussion here may be helpful in providing a context within which the findings reported in the next chapter can be interpreted.

A. IMPLEMENTATION OF FOOD STAMP WORK REQUIREMENTS

The findings of this research provide some perspective on the work requirement that actually was imposed on work registrants in this study. In spite of the original objective of focusing on areas in which a "meaningful work requirement" was in place, we cannot judge whether the WR/JS programs described in this report meet that criterion. Equally important, perhaps, we cannot say how many other States or localities had such programs in 1986, and therefore, whether differences that may have existed between their WR/JS programs and those operated in Alabama and Washington would have produced different patterns of Food Stamp Program participation by work registrants in those areas.

Exhibit III.1 provides a summary of findings regarding the WR/JS process in the study sites. The highlights are:

- most work registrants in the study sites failed to keep the first appointment for their assessment interview;
- the ES eventually submitted reports of noncompliance for approximately half of all the work registrants whose cases were included in the study; and
- fewer than one of five sample work registrants in Alabama and only two of five in Washington actually contacted potential employers in a job search.

Also, most ES assessment interviews (89.4 percent in Alabama and 73.9 percent in Washington) were not scheduled until the month after the month in which the food stamp application was submitted. Many (37.9 percent in Alabama and 16.2 percent in Washington) were not scheduled until two months later.

Exhibit III.1
 Work Registration/Job Search
 Activities Among Sample Work Registrants

Work Registration/ Job Search Activity	Length of Initial Spell					
	Alabama			Washington		
	1-3 Months	4-6 Months	> 6 Months	1-3 Months	4-6 Months	> 6 Months
Failed to Keep Appointment	73.8%	62.0%	43.4%	71.9%	47.5%	34.4%
Noncompliance Report Filed by ES	71.7%	36.7%	13.2%	65.6%	41.0%	34.4%
Engaged in Job Search	6.7%	27.8%	42.3%	21.9%	52.4%	59.4%

These findings can be explained in part by the fact that work registrants tend to remain on food stamps for relatively brief spells. As we discuss below, approximately half of the work registrants included in this study spent three months or less on food stamps before ending their first spell. The data in Exhibit III.2 suggest that by the time an appointment was scheduled (or rescheduled) or before job search began, many work registrant households had left the Food Stamp Program. It is plausible, therefore, that the high rate of turnover among work registrants simply made it difficult for the food stamp and ES offices to keep pace with the flow of work registrants through the program.

B. CHARACTERISTICS OF WORK REGISTRANTS IN THE STUDY

Characteristics of Work Registrants

The typical work registrant in this study was relatively young (a mean of 33.8 years in Alabama and 30.2 years in Washington), and a large proportion had not completed 12 years of education (42.5 percent in Alabama and 35.2 percent in Washington).^{*} Slightly more than half (55 percent) of the sample work registrants in Alabama were female, whereas women comprised approximately one-third (35 percent) of the sample in Washington. Although case records in Washington did not indicate the race of work registrants, data from Alabama showed that nearly three of five (59 percent) work registrants in that State were black. Only one-third (34 percent) of the sample work registrants in Alabama had work experience, whereas nearly four of five (79.6 percent) work registrants in Washington had worked. Of those who had work experience, nearly half in both States (47.5 percent in Alabama and 45.7 percent in Washington) had worked less than six months in their most recent job.

Many of the work registrants in the study samples lack the education and training that is necessary for them to obtain jobs that pay well and are not subject to being eliminated during recessionary periods. Also, despite their general lack of education and training, the majority of work registrants in the two study samples were more likely to have recent work experience than previous research would suggest. Perhaps more than any other personal factor, this experience should facilitate their return to the labor force, and their departure from the

^{*}The characteristics of sample work registrants are compared to nationally representative samples of work registrants and E&T participants in Appendix B.

Exhibit III.2

Length of Initial Spell for Work Registrants Who Were Noncompliant or Who Engaged in Job Search

Work Registration/ Job Search Activity	Length of Initial Spell	Alabama	Washington
<i>Failed to Keep Appointment:</i>			
	1-3 Months	63.2%	53.5%
	4-6 Months	22.0%	33.7%
	> 6 Months	14.8%	12.8%
		100.0%	100.0%
	(N)	(223)	(86)
<i>Noncompliance Report Filed by ES:</i>			
	1-3 Months	77.8%	53.8%
	4-6 Months	16.5%	32.1%
	> 6 Months	5.7%	14.1%
		100.0%	100.0%
	(N)	(176)	(78)
<i>Engaged in Job Search:</i>			
	1-3 Months	19.1%	21.5%
	4-6 Months	32.4%	49.2%
	> 6 Months	48.5%	29.2%
		100.0%	99.9%
	(N)	(68)	(65)

Food Stamp Program. However, we should recognize that experience and training cannot always counteract the powerful market forces that prevail in periods of economic decline.

**Characteristics
of Work Regis-
trant Households**

Many work registrants (46.9 percent in Alabama and 55.5 percent in Washington) lived in one-person food stamp households. One-third of the work registrant households in Alabama and fewer than one-fourth (21.5 percent) of those in Washington contained three or more members. One-third (32.9 percent) of the households in Washington and one-fourth (25.8 percent) of the households in Alabama had earnings when they applied for food stamps in early 1986. The sample households in Washington received an average food stamp allotment of \$105, whereas those in Alabama received coupons worth \$132.

C. CONCLUSIONS

The work registrants in this study are similar in many ways to participants in the Food Stamp Employment and Training (E&T) Programs now being operated by the States. The lack of glaring differences between the two samples, or between the sample work registrants and nationally representative profiles of work registrants and E&T participants, tends to eliminate one possible source of anomalous findings.

It is less clear that the work requirements actually implemented in Alabama and Washington conform to practices in other States and localities. Some differences in implementation (for example, the proportion of initial interviews conducted the same month in which the food stamp application was filed, and the proportion of work registrants who actually engaged in job search) exist between the two States in the study. It is probably the case that similar variations in performance exist across all the States and among localities within each State. What the two States do have in common, however, is a relatively high rate of noncompliance, exemplified by the fact that about half of all work registrants for whom ES records were available were reported to the food stamp office for noncompliance. This, in conjunction with the flow of work registrants through the WR/JS process, combined to produce what seems to have been a relatively weak work requirement during the study period in 1986.

IV. LONGITUDINAL ANALYSIS OF PARTICIPATION

This chapter describes patterns of participation in the Food Stamp Program in Alabama and Washington by work registrants who first began to receive food stamps in early 1986. In it, we examine the duration of spells of participation, the rate at which cases involving multiple spells returned to food stamps during the 33-month period we observed these cases, and the value of food stamp allotments provided to work registrant households.

A. PATTERNS OF FOOD STAMP PARTICIPATION BY WORK REGISTRANTS

In this section, we first describe the analytical techniques employed in this research. Next, we describe the duration of initial spells of participation by work registrants in Alabama and Washington, and the proportion who remain in the program after various durations of participation. Then we discuss the proportion of work registrants among the entry cohort who go on to have more than one spell of food stamp participation during the period of observation.

Methods of Analysis

In order to make unbiased (or valid) estimates of the duration of spells of food stamp participation, the proportion remaining on the program after various durations, and of the proportion of cases entering multiple spells within a given period of time, two problems that are common to nearly all longitudinal data collection need to be resolved.

First, at the last month of observation (October 1988), some work registrants were still involved in a spell (whether their first, second, or higher order spell). In analyzing the length of the first spell, for example, we need to deal with the cases (which happen to be small in number) who have not completed the first spell. These spells would terminate at some unknown time after the end of the observation period. If these incomplete spells were omitted from the analysis of the duration of first spells, and the calculation based only on those spells completed by October, 1988, then the computed average length of first spells would be shorter than what the "true" value would be--i.e., the value that would be obtained if it were possible to extend the observation period to follow all first spells to their completion. (It is usually impractical to implement such a long observation period in most studies.) To avoid the biased results obtained when these incomplete spells are omitted, we use the life table technique of analysis. This technique, which includes ongoing spells in the analysis

along with completed spells, will be the method used to examine the durations of first, second and higher order spells, as well as the length of time between spells.

The second data problem to be overcome is that because the observation period was a fixed 33-month period, the length of time elapsing from the completion of the first spell to the end of the observation period (October, 1988) varies from case to case. This length depends on how long the first spell was--the longer the first spell, the shorter the amount of time remaining between its completion and the end of the observation period. Assuming that everything else is equal, a work registrant who faces a longer period of time between the end of his first spell and October, 1988, has a greater chance of beginning a second spell by October, 1988--just because of the greater opportunity afforded by the longer time period. Thus, work registrants with shorter first spells would be more likely to have a second spell, and those with short first and second spells would, for the same reason, be more likely to have a third spell, etc. This positive association between short spells and the probability of having multiple spells cannot be taken to be valid unless it is found even when the varying availability of time is taken into account in the analysis. Life table techniques accomplish this. Thus we use life tables to describe the proportion of work registrants beginning a second spell after completing a first, or a third spell after a second one.

Similarly, the association of certain characteristics of work registrants with both shorter first spells and the experience of multiple spells cannot be interpreted to mean that these characteristics affect the likelihood of entering multiple spells unless the association is found even after an adjustment is made for the varying availability of time. The latter can be done by performing life table analyses for subgroups formed by the characteristics of interest, but usually only one or two characteristics can be examined at a time. To conduct a multivariate analysis, in which many characteristics can be simultaneously considered, and in which the varying availability of time is taken into account, we use the technique of the hazards model. This technique performs a multivariate analysis of probabilities computed from the life table. We use the hazards model to examine the factors influencing the probability of ending the first spell, and of beginning a second spell among those who have completed a first spell.

Another reason that work registrants have varying lengths of time in which to have a first or subsequent spell is that they could have

entered the food stamps program during a six-month period, but the end of observation occurred in October, 1988 for all cases. Those who entered in January, 1986 had the longest period of observation, and those entering in June had the shortest--by six months. This problem is also remedied by life table techniques.

The life table technique takes the parts of each case's history available before the end of the observation period to compute the proportions or probabilities of remaining in the program. For example, the data for the first month of the first spell for all cases are combined to compute the probability of work registrants remaining in the program that month. Next, the probability of remaining in the program a second month is computed. In order to have a chance of remaining in the program a second month, the case must not have left the program in the first month, nor have had their spell cut off by the end of the observation period; and so this computation is based on this subset of cases. (This chance is known as the "conditional probability," i.e., the probability of staying in the spell a second month, conditional on having stayed in it to the beginning of the month.) Third, the probability of remaining in the program a third month is computed on the basis of the subset of cases who remained in the program through the second month and who remained under observation. The overall probability of remaining in the program through the third month is obtained by multiplying the three separate conditional probabilities associated with remaining in the program through each of the first three months. The complete life table would be constructed in this fashion until the longest possible duration is reached (33 months) or until the number of cases surviving to a given month becomes too small for making stable estimates. The overall probabilities of remaining in the program through each successive month is the "survival curve."

All cases who remain in a spell (and who remain under observation) through a given month contribute to the computation of the conditional probability for that month. But for the months after work registrants have terminated a spell or after their spell has been cut off by the end of the observation period, such cases do not enter into the calculation of the conditional probabilities for those months. Thus, all the available information of all cases is used in the life table.

The durations of spells can be summarized from the life tables as a median spell, i.e., when half the life table population had ended a spell. Also, quartiles or other similar summary measures can be read off the life table.

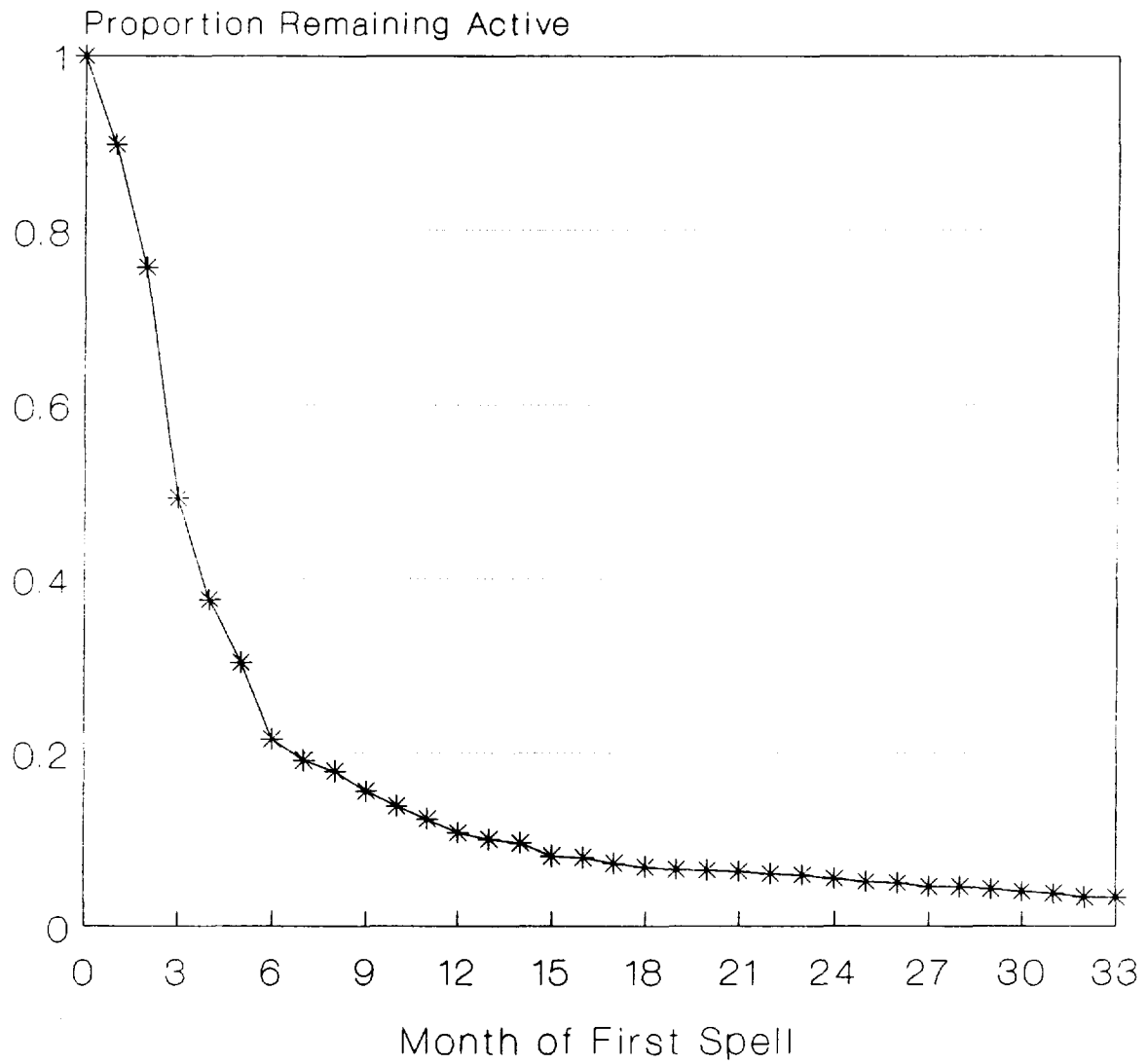
Duration of Initial Spells

Exhibit IV.1 presents the results of a life-table analysis of the initial spells of all the sample work registrant cases from Alabama and Washington. The numbers along the horizontal axis indicate the number of months following initial food stamp certification not the first month of the entry window (i.e., January 1986). The numbers along the vertical axis range from 0 to 1.0, where 1.0 indicates the full sample as of the month of initial certification for each case in the sample. Thus, one month after initial certification, approximately 90 percent of the cases remained active. Stated another way, 10 percent of the cases received food stamps for one month, but did not receive food stamps in what would have been the second month of their certification period. Similarly, by the end of two months, about 25 percent of the work registrant households were no longer participating.

In general, approximately half of the entry cohort had left the Food Stamp Program by the end of the third month. Thus, the median spell length for initial spells across both States is 2.97 months. Based on the life-table analysis, only 3.4 percent of the work registrant households that initially entered the Food Stamp Program in early 1986 would still be active 33 months later. Interestingly, the same rate of departure from the rolls occurred over the next three months. By the sixth month after initial certification, only 21.6 percent of the cohort, slightly less than half of the cases that continued to participate after three months, remained active. At the end of 12 months, only 10.8 percent of the households continued in their first spell.

The pattern of first spells we have just described is important. Recall from the previous chapter that nearly three-fourths (72.6 percent) of the Alabama work registrant households and two-thirds (66.4 percent) of the Washington households experienced only one spell of participation. In terms of the number of households affected by work requirements, therefore, the experience of most is reflected in Exhibit IV.1. Perhaps the most noteworthy characteristic of the survival curve is the set of four distinct phases: I: months 1-3; II: months 4-6; III: months 6-12; and IV: months 12-33. The pronounced changes in the slope of the curve reflect the rates at which participants leave the program during each phase. As noted above, 50.7 percent of the entry cohort had left the program by the end of the third month. Of the remaining cases, 56.3 percent left by the end of the sixth month.

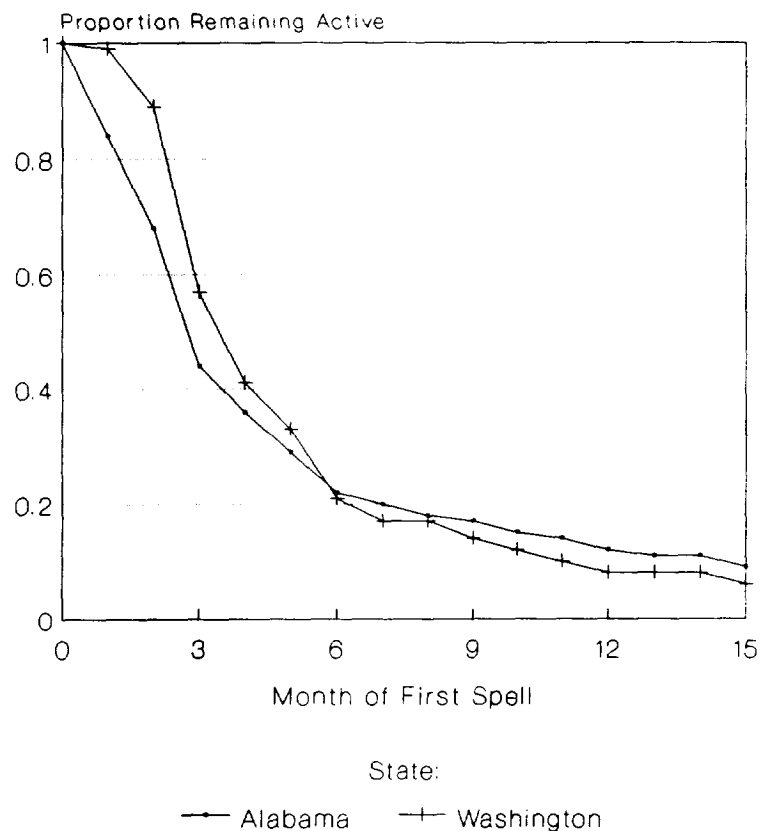
Exhibit IV.1
Proportion of Cases Remaining Active
After Successive Months of First Spell



Set of Cases:
—*— Alabama & Washington

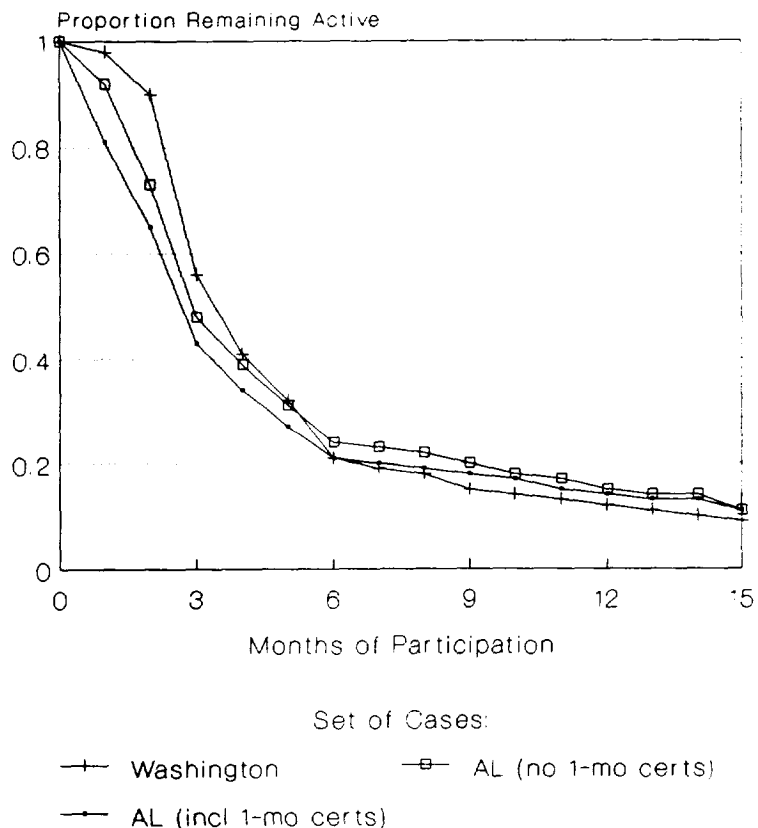
Exhibit IV.2 depicts separate survival curves for work registrant households in Alabama and Washington. During the study period, Washington State did not require work registration of any person whose household was certified for only one month. The effect of this policy is apparent in the chart. Only 1.1 percent of the households in Washington left the program after participating one month. As a result, a large and statistically significant difference exists between the two States in the early months. It is important to note, however, that the slope of the two curves is nearly identical between the second and third months, that they converge at month six, and that they are not statistically different after that point. It seems reasonable to conclude, therefore, that Washington's work registration practice regarding households with one-month certification periods affects rates of short-term participation more than intermediate or long-term participation.

Exhibit IV.2
Proportion of Cases Remaining Active
After Successive Months of First Spell



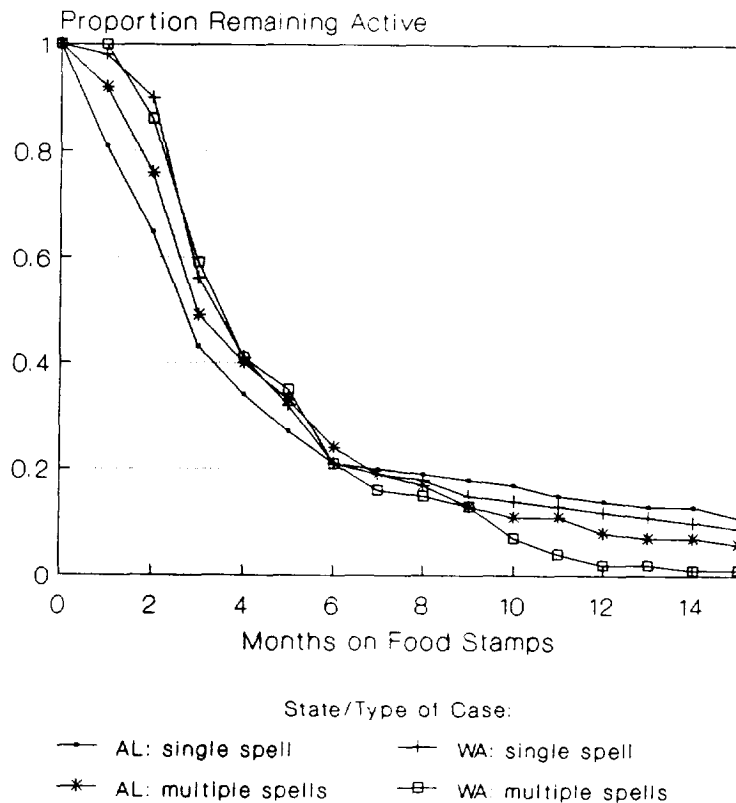
This conclusion tends to be supported by the survival curves shown in Exhibit IV.3. This is similar to the two curves presented above in Exhibit IV.2 except that these curves represent households that only had a single spell of participation. Also, we have added a third curve that shows the pattern for Alabama households that had certification periods greater than one month (i.e., it excludes households with one-month certification periods). Doing this demonstrates the comparability of patterns of participation for single-spell cases in the two States. While the difference in the curves for Washington and Alabama households with certification periods of more than one month is statistically significant at the .052 level using the Breslow/Wilcoxon test, which is affected by the more numerous early observations, it is not significant when using the Mantel/Cox test, which is more sensitive to events that occur later in the observation period.

Exhibit IV.3
Single-Spell Cases Remaining Active
After Successive Months on Program



In anticipation of our examination of households with multiple spells, it is useful to compare the first spells of households that had only one spell with those of households that returned to the program after leaving it. Exhibit IV.4 contains a number of interesting comparisons, both between the two States and between household types within each State. First, the difference between Alabama and Washington that we noted above persists, of course, but the survival curve for multiple-spell households in Alabama is much more similar to Washington than single-spell households in Alabama. Second, single- and multiple-spell households in Washington had nearly identical patterns of participation during the first nine months. After that, however, multiple-spell households tended to leave the program at a much higher rate (only to return subsequently, however). Finally, while a segment of single-spell cases in Alabama tends to leave the Food Stamp Program very quickly, another segment is the group most at risk of a long initial spell (i.e., more than six months). It should be noted that the pattern of participation for a similar sized segment of single-spell cases in Washington is virtually identical after the sixth month.

Exhibit IV.4
Proportion of Cases Remaining Active
by Pattern of Participation: 1st Spell



Multiple Spells

Based on life-table estimates, only 32 percent of work registrant households that leave the Food Stamp Program after an initial spell in Washington and Alabama would later apply for and receive food stamps in the same locality within 33 months of initial certification of the first spell. The actual distribution of cases by number of spells is shown in Exhibit IV.5. It indicates a very similar pattern of multiple spells, in that nearly one-fourth of the entry cohort (20.7 percent in Alabama and 24.7 percent in Washington) experienced two spells, and about one in 20 cases (4.6 percent in Alabama and six percent in Washington) experienced three spells. Fewer than three percent of the households in either State had more than three spells. While there is very little difference in the lengths of first and second spells in Washington, second spells in Alabama are nearly twice as long as initial spells in that State, and 45 percent longer than second spells in Washington.

Exhibit IV.5

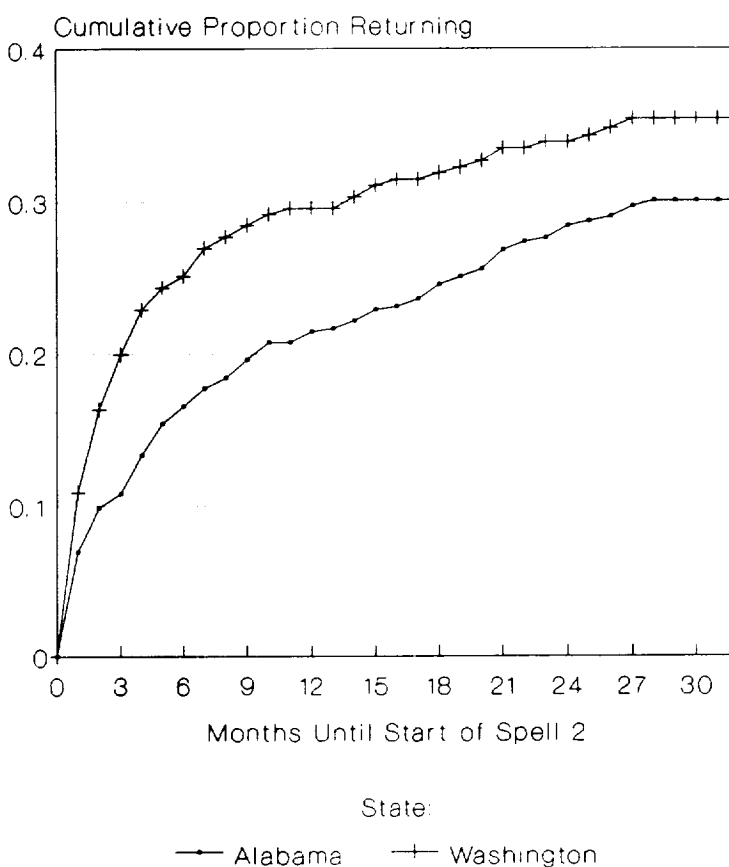
Distribution of Cases by Number of Spells and Length of Spells

Number of Spells	Alabama		Washington	
	%	Median Spell (mos.)	%	Median Spell (mos.)
1: 1-3 mos.	41.6	2	29.2	3
1: 4-6 mos.	15.5	5	23.8	5
1: > 6 mos.	<u>15.5</u>	15	<u>13.2</u>	13
1: Subtotal	72.6	3	66.2	4
2	20.7	5	24.9	4
3	4.6	*	6.0	*
4	1.7	*	1.8	*
5	0.4	*	0.7	*
6	--	*	0.4	*
Total	100.0%		100.0%	
N	459		281	

*Not computed due to small subsamples.

Although second spells tend to be of longer duration in Alabama, the curves in Exhibit IV.6 indicate that households in Alabama were slower to return to the food stamp caseload than households in Washington. Whereas 20 percent of the households in Washington returned to the program within three months of the completion of their initial spell of participation, only 10.8 percent of the households in Alabama had returned by that point. Following this initial difference, cases in the two States ultimately experienced similar rates of return, as indicated by the similar slopes of the two curves in the exhibit; however, the cumulative proportion returning by 33 months was lower in Alabama.

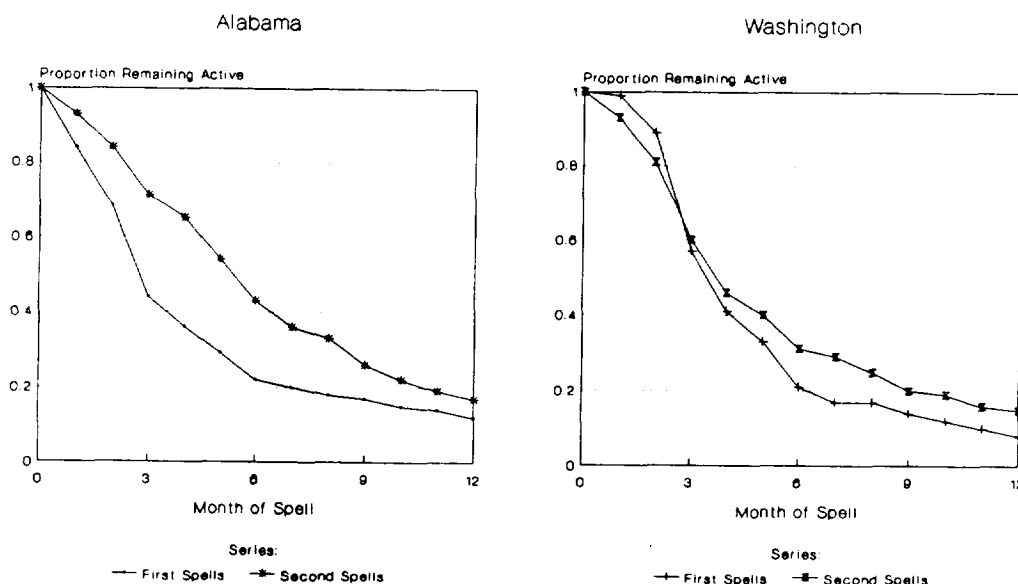
Exhibit IV.6
Rate of Cases Returning for Second Spell



The rate of return for work registrants in Washington is similar to that reported by Burstein and Visser (1989). Using OBRA data they found that 18.3 percent of work registrant cases reopened within 3 months of closing. Within 33 months, more than half of the work registrant case closings observed in that study led to a reopening. Recall, however, that their analysis focused on spells and not cases. This approach disregards whether a "completed closed spell" occurs following a second or third spell. Our analysis, in contrast, concerns only reopenings following an initial spell.

Consistent with the longer median spell lengths reported in Exhibit IV.5, the pattern of second spells in Alabama and Washington indicates that work registrant households are slower in completing a second spell. As shown in Exhibit IV.7, this tendency is much more pronounced in Alabama, although the proportion of households remaining active at the end of 12 months is similar for first and second spells. Cases in Washington follow a similar pattern and almost the same proportion of households remains active at the end of 12 months in the two States. It is interesting to note, too, that a larger proportion of households in Washington left the program after one or two months of participation. This stands in marked contrast to the effect Washington's exemption of households certified for one month had on first spells.

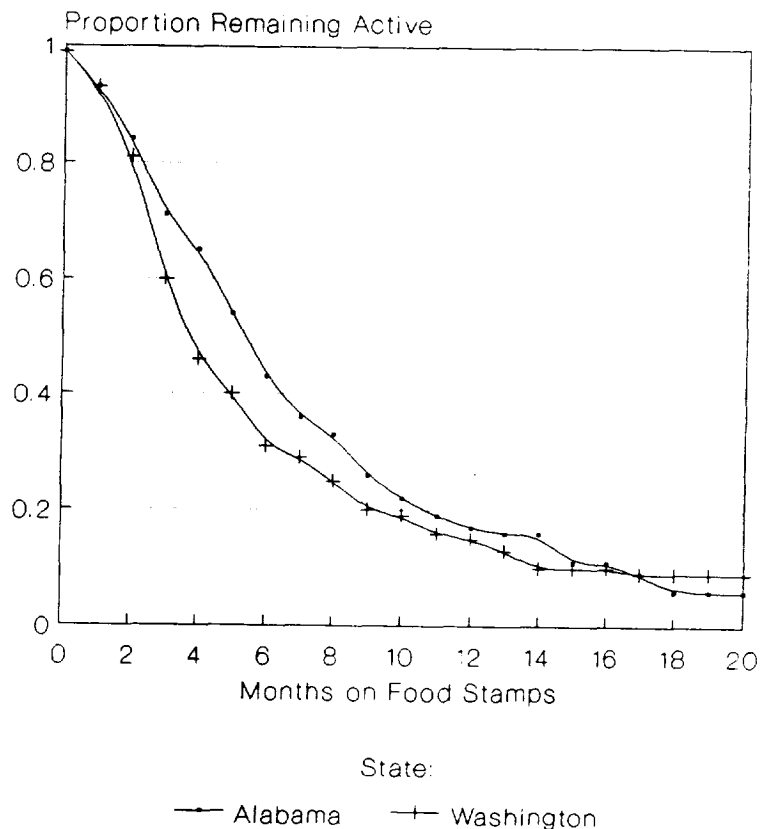
Exhibit IV.7
Comparison of First and Second Spells by State



We present survival curves depicting second spells in Washington and Alabama in Exhibit IV.8. In contrast to the difference between the two States in the first phase of initial spells, the pattern of participation for second spells is nearly identical in the first two months. While households in Washington began to leave the program more quickly in the third month, the curves nearly converge again by the tenth month. Using the Breslow/Wilcoxon test of statistical significance, the survival functions for the two States are different at the .058 level. They are not significantly different, however, based on other tests that are more sensitive to latter stages of the observation period when fewer cases remain in the analysis.

The small number of households that experience more than two spells does not warrant similar analyses of higher-order spells. Therefore, we will not present survival curves for third through sixth spells; however, data describing cases involving such spells are useful in our analysis of the value of allotments provided to work registrant households.

Exhibit IV.8
Proportion of Cases Remaining Active
After Successive Months of Second Spell



B. THE COST OF WORK REGISTRANTS' PARTICIPATION OVER TIME

One of the goals of the Food Stamp E&T Program is to invest resources in a way that will increase participants' self-sufficiency, reduce their dependence on food stamps and thereby reduce food stamp costs. As in any public program, efficient use of resources requires that they be targeted where they will achieve the greatest impact for the least cost. In order to do this, Federal and State E&T planners and program managers must have information that enables them to identify needs so that they can develop strategies to meet them. One indicator of a household's need for E&T resources is the value of the food stamp allotments they receive over time. If this criterion of need were adopted, it would provide a basis for targeting E&T resources, as well as help program managers and administrators meet the goal of reduced program costs.

In addition to describing the patterns of participation among households in the Food Stamp Program during the 33-month observation period, case record data provide accurate information about the value of the allotments households received. In this section of the report, we use those data to estimate the cost of allotments to work registrant households that exhibit different patterns of participation. We define two types of costs, average monthly allotments and total costs (i.e., across time and spells). We provide cost estimates for four types of households--those which experienced a single spell lasting one to three months; those which experienced a single spell lasting four to six months; those which experienced a single spell lasting more than six months; and those which experienced more than one spell. We begin by examining average monthly allotments.

Exhibit IV.9 summarizes the average monthly food stamp allotment for different types of work registrant households in both States. The mean is \$115 for Alabama and \$100 for Washington. There is, however, a fairly substantial degree of variation among household types. For example, among single-spell cases in Alabama, the average monthly allotment is larger for spells of longer duration. This is significant because it implies that it would be more costly to serve households with long single spells in that State, not simply because of the length of the spell, but because of household characteristics that cause each month's allotment to be larger than average. A similar difference occurs among single-spell cases in Washington, although

Exhibit IV.9

Average Monthly Allotment Per Case
by Pattern of Participation

	Alabama	Washington
SINGLE SPELL CASES:		
All Single Spells:		
Mean Monthly Allotment	\$115	\$100
N	333	186
Single Spell 1-3 Mos.:		
Mean Monthly Allotment	\$99	\$94
N	191	82
Single Spell 4-6 Mos.:		
Mean Monthly Allotment	\$120	\$95
N	71	67
Single Spell > 6 Mos.:		
Mean Monthly Allotment	\$154	\$121
N	71	37
MULTIPLE-SPELL CASES:		
First Spell:		
Mean Monthly Allotment	\$121	\$94
N	126	95
Second Spell:		
Mean Monthly Allotment	\$130	\$90
N	126	95
Third Spell:		
Mean Monthly Allotment	\$113	\$108
N	31	25

the difference is only apparent between the longer term cases (>6 months) and the others (<6 months). There is no clear pattern in terms of the average value of monthly allotments to households experiencing multiple spells. Although allotments to these households in Alabama tend to be larger than average, the same is not true among households in Washington. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that the households receiving the largest monthly allotments in Washington were the long-term single-spell cases and households that experienced three spells (data are not reported for higher order spells because of small subgroup samples).

The total value of allotments provided to work registrant households during the 33-month observation period are shown in Exhibit IV.10. Total allotments valued at more than a half-million dollars (\$517,094) were provided to households in Alabama, while work registrant households in Washington received allotments totalling \$255,978. Households in Alabama received an average of \$1,127 during the period, somewhat larger than the \$911 in coupons received by their counterparts in Washington.

It is apparent from the data in Exhibit IV.10 that multiple-spell households in both States received the largest share of allotments provided to work-registrant households in the study samples. While this group imposed the greatest absolute cost, a smaller group of households, those involving a long single spell, were more costly to serve. This type of household received allotments that totaled, on average, more than \$3,000 in Alabama and more than \$2,000 in Washington. In Alabama, the total of these costs was almost as large as that incurred from cases that experienced multiple spells.

These findings indicate that average total allotment costs are greatest for households experiencing long single spells, but the largest share of allotment costs is attributable to multiple-spell households. This pattern suggests that the group of work registrant households which experiences more than one spell is considerably larger than the group which experiences a single long spell. In fact, as shown in Exhibit IV.10, this is the case. Although single spell cases in Alabama, for example, account for only 15.5 percent of the sample of work-registrant households that entered the program in early 1986, they accounted for 41.4 percent of the total cost of allotments provided to households in the sample through late 1988. Similarly, only 13.2 percent of the sample from Washington had long single spells, but they received 29.2 percent of the food stamp allotments to sample households from that State.

Exhibit IV.10

Total Cost Per Case by Pattern of Participation

	Alabama	Washington
<hr/>		
ALL CASES:		
Value of All Allotments	\$517,094	\$255,978
Average Per Case	\$1,127	\$911
N	459	281
SINGLE-SPELL CASES:		
<u>Single Spell 1-3 Mos.</u>		
Value of All Allotments	\$41,110	\$20,896
Average Per Case	\$215	\$255
Percentage of Sample	41.6%	29.2%
Percentage of Allotments	8.0%	8.2%
<u>Single Spell 4-6 Mos.</u>		
Value of All Allotments	\$41,813	\$31,505
Average Per Case	\$589	\$470
Percentage of Sample	15.5%	23.8%
Percentage of Allotments	8.1%	12.3%
<u>Single Spell > 6 Mos.</u>		
Value of All Allotments	\$213,998	\$74,653
Average Per Case	\$3,014	\$2,018
Percentage of Sample	15.5%	13.2%
Percentage of Allotments	41.4%	29.2%
MULTIPLE-SPELL CASES:		
Value of All Allotments	\$220,173	\$128,924
Average Per Case	\$1,747	\$1,357
Percentage of Sample	27.5%	33.8%
Percentage of Allotments	42.6%	50.4%
<hr/>		

Our analysis of work registrant households in this study, as well as further analysis of the State Data Systems data base, suggest that larger households may find it more difficult to achieve a level of earnings that will make them ineligible for food stamps. Instead, their earnings simply result in their receiving a smaller allotment. Generally, however, the impact of individual and household characteristics on patterns of participation is rather weak (see Appendix D). As a result, targeting job search or other E&T services to particular types of work registrants or their households might entail a high degree of error.

C. CONCLUSIONS

In reviewing the findings of this study, it is important to keep in mind that more than half of the sample households (57.1 percent in Alabama and 53.0 percent of the households in Washington) received food stamps for six months or less, left the program, and did not return during the remainder of the 33-month observation period. We expected to find a relatively low degree of dependency given that work registrants are generally able-bodied, of working age, and do not have prime responsibility for the care of a young child or a disabled adult. It is difficult to determine, however, whether food stamp work-registrant households are more or less dependent on the program over the longer term than other types of households because comparable data do not exist. Given this lack of information, it is more appropriate for us to focus on differences in the patterns of participation among subgroups of the work registrants we studied.

The findings of this exploratory study suggest that work registrants' long-term dependency on the Food Stamp Program is manifest in two ways. First, a small segment of sample households that experienced only one spell (fewer than one in six in both States) continued to receive an allotment for more than six months. With median spells of 15 months in Alabama and 13 months in Washington, these households had the highest average total allotments of any group.

The second pattern of dependency we observed among food stamp work registrants was a series of relatively brief spells. Households that experienced multiple spells represented approximately one-fourth (27.5 percent) of the sample in Alabama and one-third (33.8 percent) of the sample in Washington. In both States, this group accounted for the largest share of total allotment costs. In light of the impact on costs of households that experience multiple spells, this is an important pattern of participation, and one that implies a form of

long-term dependency on the Food Stamp Program other than a single long spell.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study, based on a longitudinal analysis of a unique entry cohort sample, yield some new perspectives concerning work registrants' participation in the Food Stamp Program. In this chapter, we offer some concluding observations concerning the significance of the study's findings and potential implications for administrators of the Food Stamp Program and State Employment and Training (E&T) programs. We also point to areas for further research that may help confirm the findings of this exploratory study.

A. PATTERNS OF PARTICIPATION BY WORK REGISTRANTS

Most of the work registrant households examined in this study received food stamps for six months or less, left the program, and did not return within two to two and a half years. Even though such households constituted a majority of the work registrant households that began receiving food stamps during early 1986 in the study sites, they consumed a relatively small proportion of the total food stamp allotments provided to this group. In Alabama, they represented 57 percent of the sample, but accounted for only 16 percent of the total allotment cost. Similarly, in Washington, they made up nearly 53 percent of the sample, but received only 20 percent of the food stamp allotments.

The largest share of food stamp allotments provided to work registrant households in this study was consumed by households that experienced multiple spells within two to two and a half years after initially being certified. Although such cases do not represent more than a third of the work registrants who began receiving food stamps during the study period, they consumed nearly half (42.6 percent in Alabama and 49.3 percent in Washington) of the total food stamp allotments provided to sample households over the 33-month study period.

The group that imposed the greatest cost per household on the Food Stamp Program were cases that experienced a single spell lasting more than six months. Even though these cases constituted only 15.5 percent of the sample in Alabama and 13.8 percent of the sample in Washington, they consumed, respectively, 41.4 percent and 30.6 percent of the total allotments to sample work registrant households.

B. OPPORTUNITIES FOR TARGETING EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING RESOURCES

Some State and local food stamp agencies have had success targeting Quality Control error-prone profiles (see Usher and Duncan, 1985). Our analysis of work registrant households in this study, as well as further analysis of the State Data Systems data base, suggest that larger households may find it more difficult to achieve a level of earnings that will make them eligible for food stamps. Instead, their earnings simply result in their receiving a smaller allotment. Generally, however, the impact of individual and household characteristics on patterns of participation is rather weak (see Appendix D). As a result, targeting job research or other E&T services to particular types of work registrants or their households might entail a high degree of error.

A very appealing alternative to targeting on the basis of personal or household characteristics was suggested by the pattern of cost data that emerged from this study. If our findings are supported by a larger scale study, they might encourage the adoption of "self-selection" as an efficient means of targeting job search and E&T services on work registrants who are likely to impose the greatest cost on the Food Stamp Program. The approach would involve a very simple screening process based on two criteria. First, how long has an initially certified work registrant been participating in the program? When work-registrant households reach the sixth month of an initial spell, it would be appropriate, if the findings of this study are confirmed, to target them for careful attention. Given that such households are most at risk of enduring a long and costly spell, special intervention at this point might be appropriate.

Similarly, during all application interviews with work registrant households, eligibility specialists could ascertain whether the household had participated before and been required to register for work. Again, based on our findings concerning multiple-spell cases, it might be cost-effective to monitor more carefully the job search efforts of such work registrants. This could only be done if a relatively small amount of resources was devoted to maintaining current work registration/job search requirements for other work registrants. The information we obtained about the work registration and job search process in Alabama and Washington suggests that only a small level of effort may be required because the patterns of participation we observed in the four study areas emerged in the face of what can best be described as a minimal job search requirement.

C. FURTHER RESEARCH

Our research revealed very similar patterns of participation and program costs across samples drawn from two quite different States. If these findings are supported by larger scale studies, such as the E&T evaluation being sponsored by FNS, they might provide the basis for a strategy to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the work registration and job search process. The OBRA data base already provides a foundation for longitudinal analysis of cross-sectional samples of the food stamp work registrant caseload. Soon, the E&T evaluation will offer more up-to-date information, although not involving as lengthy a followup period.

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